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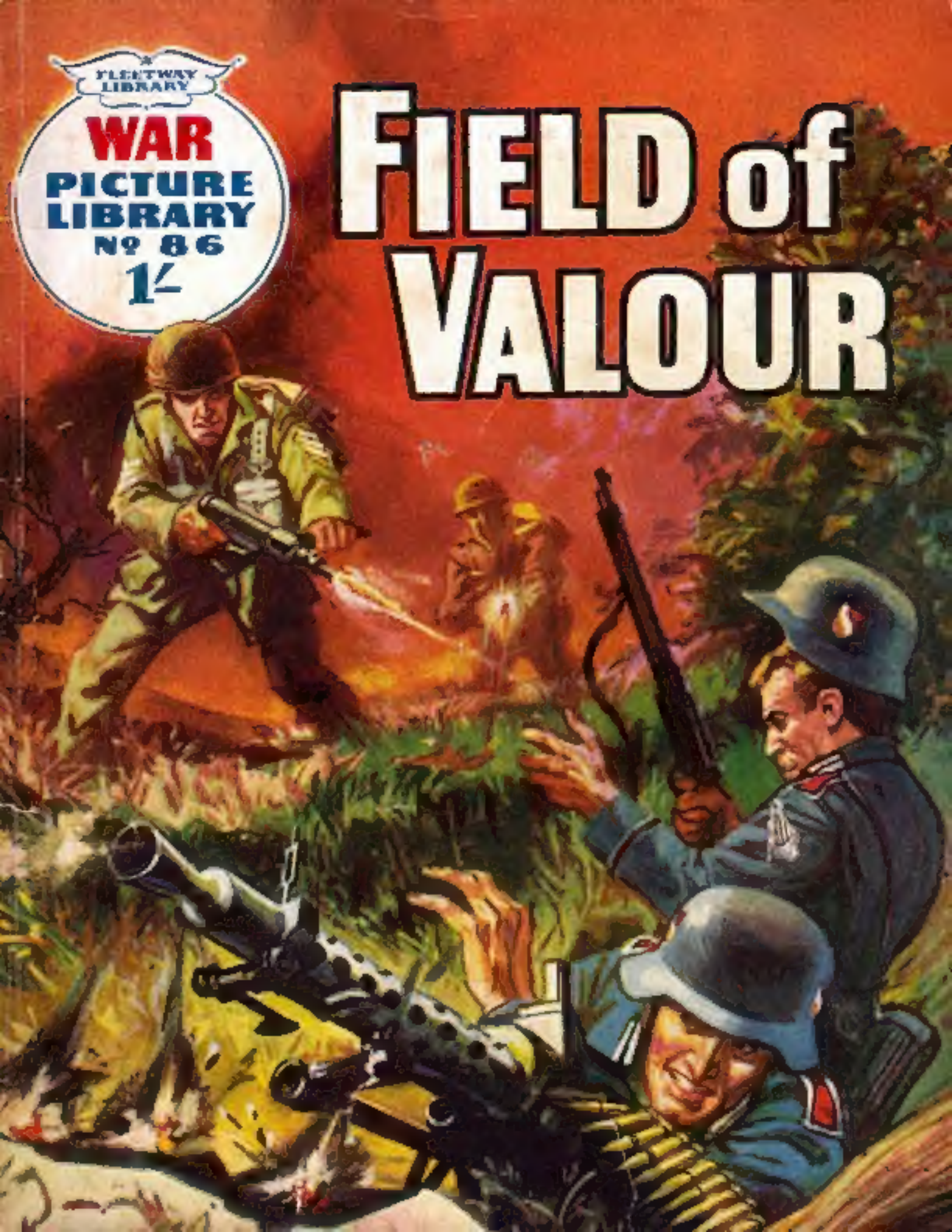

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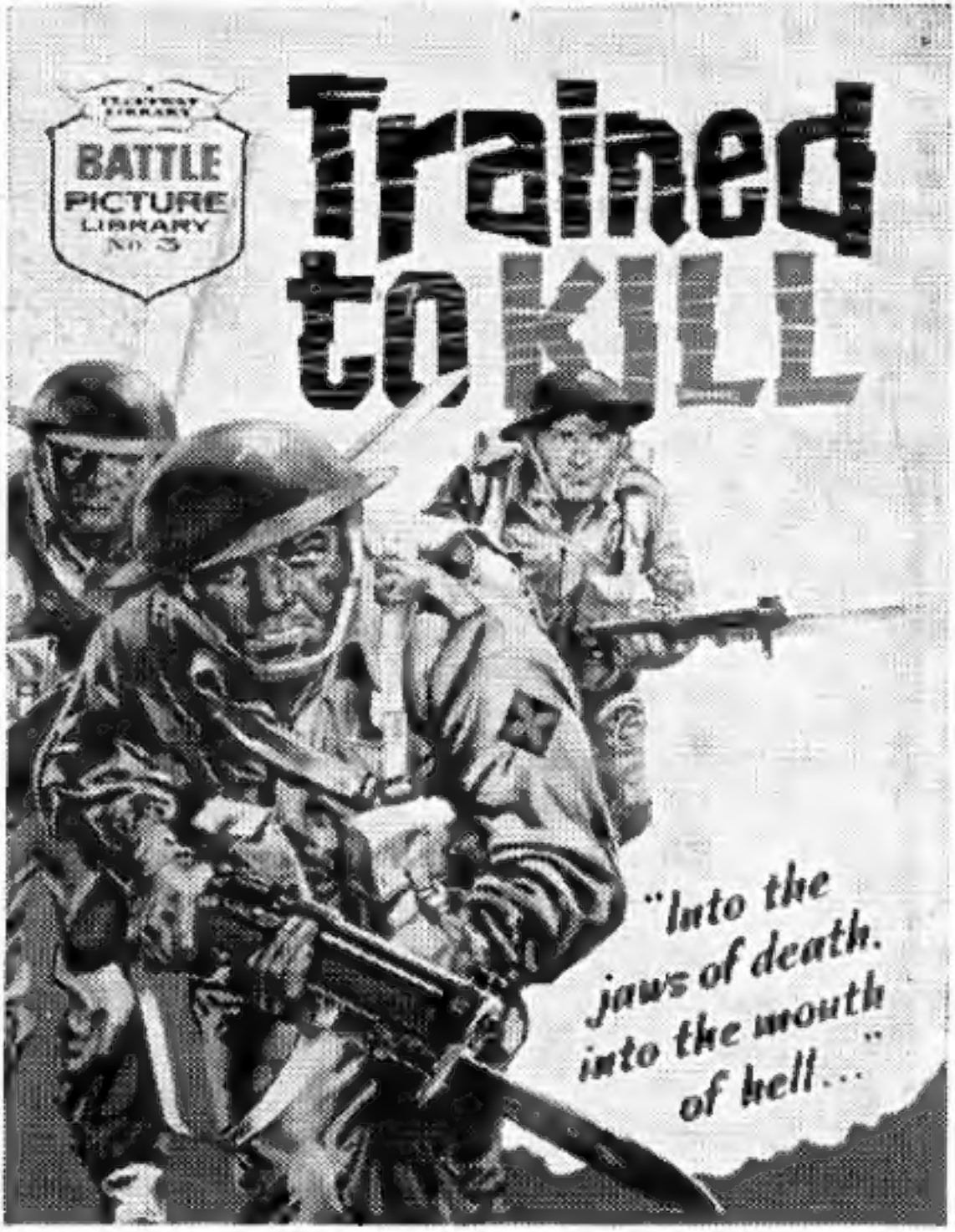

TWO Dramatic, All-action Issues Every Month

FIELD of VALOUR

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Chapter 1. DEATH DROP

THE SERGEANT WAS ONE OF THE FIRST TO FALL EVEN AS HIS MEN BEGAN TO FIGHT BACK DESPAIRINGLY.

RELENTLESSLY, THE GERMANS CLOSED IN ... PAST THE STILL, PROSTRATE FORM OF SERGEANT BRYANT.

Field of Valour

BUT THE SIXTH -- SERGEANT JIM BRYANT -- WAS ANYTHING BUT DEAD. A BULLET HAD CREASED HIS TEMPLE, STUNNING HIM, AND HE HAD BEEN HIT IN THE LEG. HE CAME TO IN TIME TO SEE HIS MEN BEING CARTED AWAY...
ALL MY BOYS -- DEAD! IT WAS A MASSACRE!

FORCING HIMSELF PAINFULLY TO HIS FEET, HE BEGAN TO STUMBLE AWAY THROUGH THE SHADOWS OF THAT FIELD OF DEATH...
THEY'LL FIND SIX 'CHUTES — AND FIVE BODIES! I'VE GOT TO GET AWAY FROM HERE...

PROGRESS WAS AGONISINGLY SLOW AND ALL THE TIME HE COULD HEAR THE SHOUTS OF THE GERMANS BEHIND HIM. THEN HE HEARD A RUSTLE AMONGST THE TREES AHEAD...
DON'T MOVE -- WHOEVER YOU ARE...
DO NOT FIRE -- THAT WILL ONLY BRING THE GERMANS. THEY ARE FRIENDS OF NEITHER OF US...

A BURLY ITALIAN FACED THE HUNTED SOLDIER AND BRYANT RESPONDED GLADLY TO THE SYMPATHY IN THE MAN'S VOICE.
I AM LUIGI PERRONI, MAYOR OF PADOSTA. YOU MUST HAVE ATTENTION FOR THIS LEG. COME WITH ME, MY FRIEND!
WHY SHOULD YOU TAKE THIS RISK ? IF THE GERMANS FIND ME IN THE VILLAGE...

BUT PERRONI BRUSHED HIS PROTESTS ASIDE AND EFFORTLESSLY SWUNG THE SERGEANT'S BULK ON TO HIS BROAD SHOULDERS.
DO NOT FEAR -- THEY WILL NOT FIND YOU. ANYWAY, IT IS A RISK THAT MUST BE TAKEN!
MY LEG... THE BLOOD... IT'S LEAVING A TRAIL.

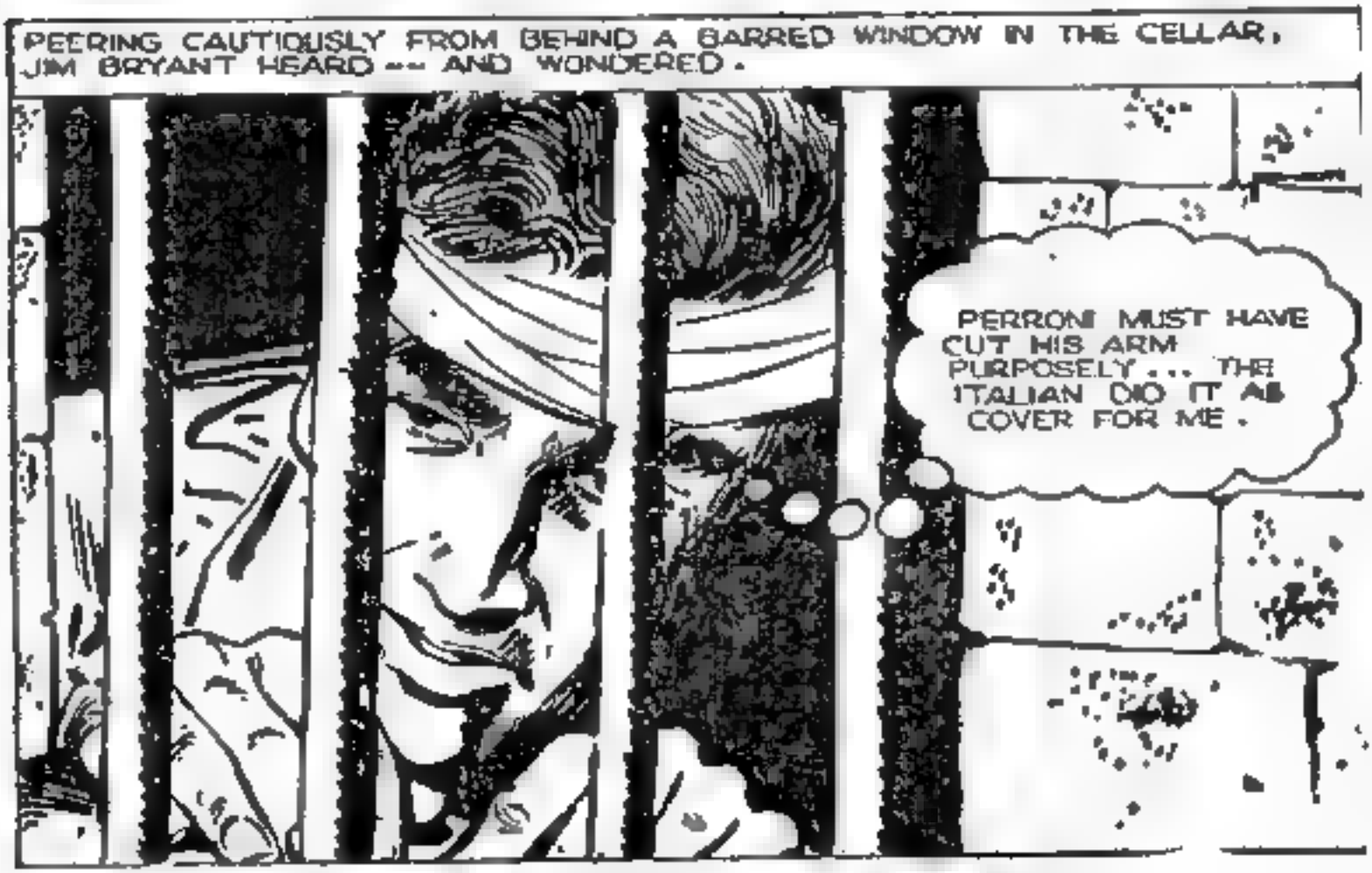
THE ITALIAN STRODE ON AND SOON THEY WERE STAGGERING ALONG A NARROW COBBLED STREET.
EVEN IF WE ARE SEEN, NO ONE WILL TELL THE GERMANS YOU ARE HERE. WE ITALIANS DO NOT LIKE THEM ANY MORE THAN YOU DO.

THEY ENTERED A HOUSE, SOMEWHAT LARGER THAN THE REST, AND THE SERGEANT WAS LEFT IN THE CARE OF THE MAYOR'S DAUGHTER SOFIA, WHILE PERRONI WENT FOR THE DOCTOR.
A BRITISHER... WELCOME, MY FRIEND. WE HOPE THAT SOON MANY OF YOUR COUNTRYMEN WILL COME AND DRIVE THE GERMANS FROM OUR FAIR LAND.
YOU CAN BANK ON THAT-- THEY'LL COME RIGHT ENOUGH.

DOCTOR BRAZZANO DRESSED THE WOUND IN BRYANT'S LEG AND A BED WAS MADE UP FOR HIM IN THE CELLAR. WITH THE DAWN THE GERMANS CAME...
A WOUNDED PARACHUTIST IS IN THE VICINITY. WE HAVE FOLLOWED A TRAIL OF BLOOD... AND IT LEADS TO YOUR DOOR.
SI, THAT IS SO!

CALMLY THE MAYOR UNTIED A BANDAGE AROUND HIS ARM, DISCLOSING A RAW, JAGGED CUT.
I WAS OUT LAST EVENING -- I CUT IT BADLY! IT MUST HAVE BEEN MY BLOOD YOU SAW...

THE GERMAN OFFICER SPUN ON HIS HEEL -- A GLITTER OF ANGER IN HIS EYE ...
SEARCH THE VILLAGE! FIND HIM!


PEERING CAUTIOUSLY FROM BEHIND A BARRED WINDOW IN THE CELLAR, JIM BRYANT HEARD -- AND WONDERED.
PERRONI MUST HAVE CUT HIS ARM PURPOSELY ... THE ITALIAN DID IT AS COVER FOR ME.

THE VILLAGE WAS SEARCHED, THE PEOPLE VICIOUSLY INTERROGATED -- BUT ALTHOUGH EVERYONE MUST HAVE KNOWN WHERE THE BRITISH SOLDIER WAS HIDDEN, THEY KEPT THEIR SECRET.

ACHTUNG! ACHTUNG! ALL OUT INTO THE MARKET PLACE!

THE GERMAN'S VOICE WAS HARSH WITH SUPPRESSED FURY AS HE HARANGUED THE ASSEMBLED VILLAGERS.

LISTEN, YOU ITALIAN DOGS. WE KNOW A WOUNDED ENGLANDER IS HIDDEN SOMEWHERE IN THE VILLAGE. YOU HAVE UNTIL DAWN TOMORROW TO GIVE HIM UP.

AT DAWN THE FOLLOWING DAY, LUIGI PERRONI WAS ESCORTED TO THE GARRISON OFFICE.
YOUR PEOPLE HAVE DEFIED MY ORDERS. THEY DO NOT RECOGNISE PEACEFUL OVERTURES— PERHAPS THEY WILL UNDERSTAND FORCE!

AT NOON, THREE HOUSES WILL BE BURNED TO THE GROUND. IF THAT FAILS TO MAKE YOU GIVE UP THE ENGLANDER TERRORIST, STRONGER MEASURES WILL BE TAKEN. HEIL HITLER!

IT WAS SOFIA WHO GAVE JIM NEWS OF THE NAZI ULTIMATUM.
IT IS UNFORTUNATE, SIGNOR ;- BUT THERE IS NOTHING WE CAN DO.
I CAN'T LET YOUR PEOPLE DO THIS FOR ME . . . . ! WAIT!

THE MAYOR ENTERED IN TIME TO HEAR THE ENGLISHMAN'S VEHEMENT PROTEST . . .
YOU WILL STAY JUST WHERE YOU ARE, MY FREND. IF YOU GIVE YOURSELF UP NOW THEY WILL BURN THE HOUSES JUST THE SAME, AND PERHAPS EVEN SHOOT SOME OF US AS A REPRISAL!

BUT I . . . I MUST DO SOMETHING!
THEN STAY QUIET . . . REST. YOUR LEG WILL THEN HEAL MORE QUICKLY.

AT NOON THAT DAY, THE COLD-FACED NAZI OFFICER CARRIED OUT HIS THREAT...

HE TURNED TO PERRONI...
NOW WILL YOU TELL ME WHERE THE ENGLANDER IS HIDDEN?
IF YOU BURN DOWN THE ENTIRE VILLAGE I CANNOT TELL YOU ANYTHING

THE GERMAN'S EYES GLINTED DANGEROUSLY, YET HIS NEXT ORDER WAS UTTERED WITHOUT A TRACE OF EMOTION.
SEIZE THOSE TWO MEN! TAKE THEM TO THE WALL OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE. SHOOT THEM IN ONE HOUR FROM NOW UNLESS YOU RECEIVE A CONTRARY ORDER SIGNED BY ME.

FOR A MOMENT THERE WAS A HORRIFIED SILENCE -- AND THEN CRIES AND SOBS BROKE FROM THE VILLAGERS.
PRODUCE THE BRITISHER, HERR MAYOR -- OR YOUR COUNTRYMEN DIE!

JIM BRYANT KNEW THERE WAS ONLY ONE COURSE OF ACTION LEFT OPEN TO HIM ...
STAND ASIDE, LUIGI. I'M GIVING MYSELF UP.
YOU ARE NOT GOING ANYWHERE, MY FRIEND.

THERE WAS PAIN AND GRIEF IN PERRONI'S EYES BUT HIS VOICE WAS FIRM ...
THE GERMANS WILL KILL MORE THAN JUST TWO MEN IF YOU GIVE YOURSELF UP. SOFIA WILL DIE, BRAZZANO WILL DIE -- MANY MORE PERHAPS -- AND THE VILLAGE WILL BE RAZED TO THE GROUND. I KNOW THESE NAZIS BETTER THAN YOU -- THEY SHOW NO MERCY.

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SO IT WAS, THAT SAME EVENING ...

I HAVE ARRANGED FOR YOU TO BE TAKEN TO SICILY IN A FISHING BOAT TONIGHT, SERGEANT. I WILL GUIDE YOU TO THE COAST MYSELF— IT IS NOT VERY FAR.

I WILL GET EVERYTHING READY, FATHER.

SOON AFTER DARK THEY MOVED OUT— JIM BRYANT'S HAVERSACK HEAVY WITH FOOD THE VILLAGERS HAD WILLINGLY GIVEN FROM THEIR MEAGRE STOCKS.

AN HOUR LATER, THEY REACHED A SHELTERED COVE. A SMALL FISHING BOAT LAY AT ANCHOR AND A DINGHY WAS GROUNDED AT THE WATER'S EDGE.

SEE— THE BOAT IS WAITING, MY FRIEND. SOON YOU WILL BE HAPPY WITH YOUR OWN PEOPLE AGAIN.

YES, BUT AT WHAT A PRICE! TWO MEN HAVE GIVEN THEIR LIVES TO BUY MY FREEDOM.

I'LL NEVER FORGET THE DEBT I OWE TO YOU AND THE PEOPLE OF PADOSTA, LUIGI. HOW CAN I REPAY YOU FOR THE SACRIFICES YOU ALL MADE ?
YOUR COUNTRYMEN CAN -- BY DRIVING THE ACCURSED NAZIS FROM ITALY.

AS THE DINGHY PULLED OUT TO THE FISHING BOAT, SERGEANT JIM BRYANT LOOKED BACK WITH GRATITUDE AND RESPECT AT THE LONELY FIGURE STANDING ON THE SHORE.
HE'S A VERY BRAVE MAN -- AND SO ARE HIS PEOPLE. A FEW MONTHS AGO THEY WERE OUR ENEMIES -- AND NOW I OWE THEM MY LIFE.

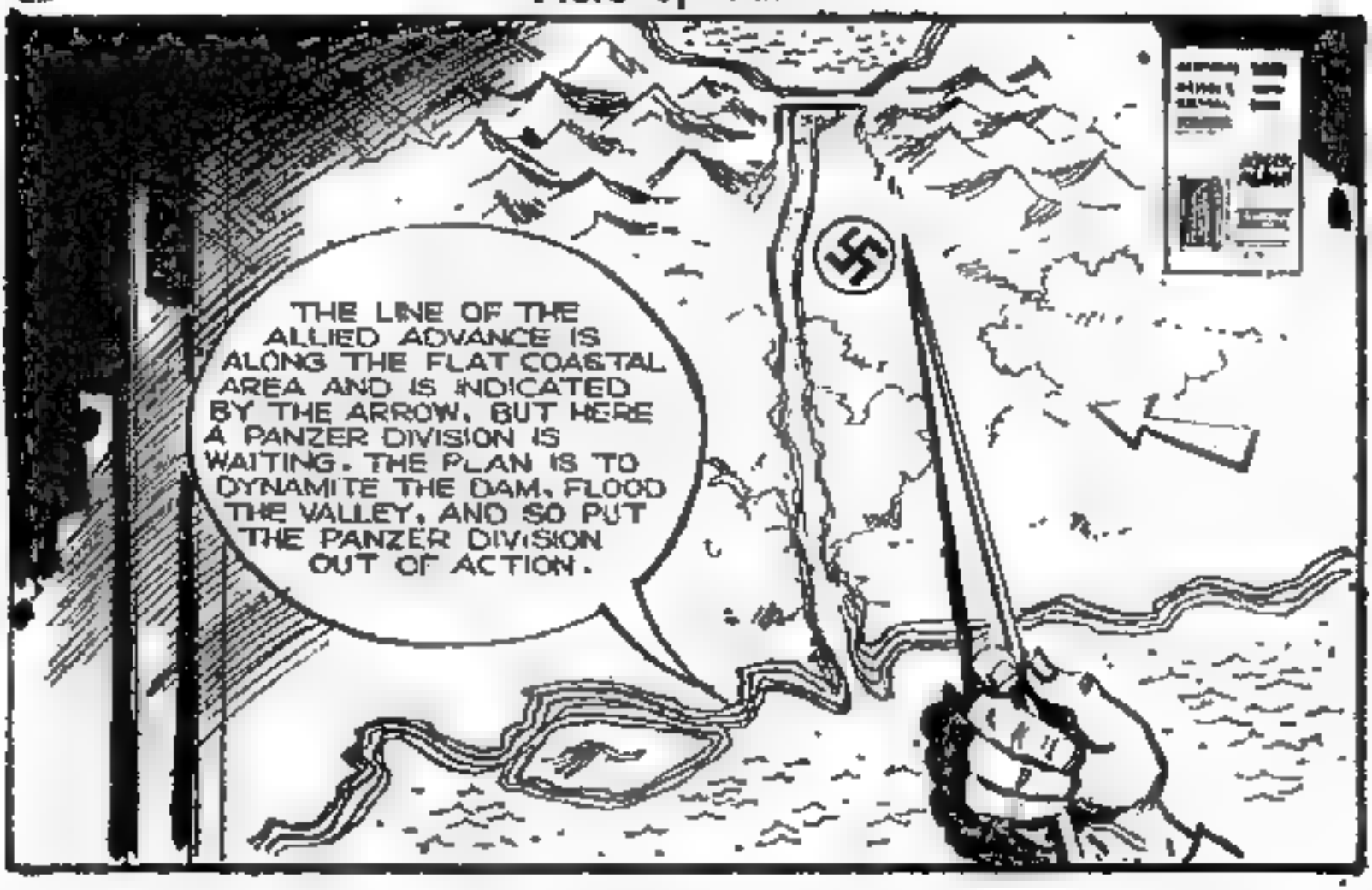
Chapter 2. MISSION IN PERIL

THE MONTHS PASSED AND THE ALLIED INVASION OF THE ITALIAN MAINLAND BECAME A FACT. BUT FOR THOSE S.A.S. BASED ON SICILY, THEIR TOUGHENING-UP TRAINING WENT ON ...
THAT'S IT... ROLL ON YOUR SHOULDER LIKE I SHOWED YOU. WHAT IS IT, CORPORAL?
SERGEANT BRYANT, COLONEL LAWRENCE WANTS YOU AT H.Q. -- AT THE DOUBLE.
OKAY, CORPORAL.

SERGEANT JIM BRYANT FOUND ANOTHER OFFICER -- A STRANGER -- WITH HIS COMMANDING OFFICER.
AT EASE, BRYANT. I HAVE SENT FOR YOU BECAUSE I THINK YOU'RE THE BEST MAN TO ACCOMPANY CAPTAIN BAXTER HERE ON A SPECIAL MISSION.
IF I MAY INTERRJPT, SIR -- I DON'T THINK BRYANT IS THE RIGHT MAN...

COLONEL LAWRENCE LOOKED UP QUESTIONINGLY...
...ANY MAN WHO COMES BEFORE HIS C.O. BUTTONS UNDONE, BATTLEDRESS AND BOOTS COVERED IN DUST...
SERGEANT BRYANT WAS ON AN ASSAULT COURSE WHEN I SENT FOR HIM, BAXTER. MY ORDERS WERE TO COME AT THE DOUBLE. HE'S THE BEST MAN FOR THE JOB ... TAKE MY WORD FOR IT.

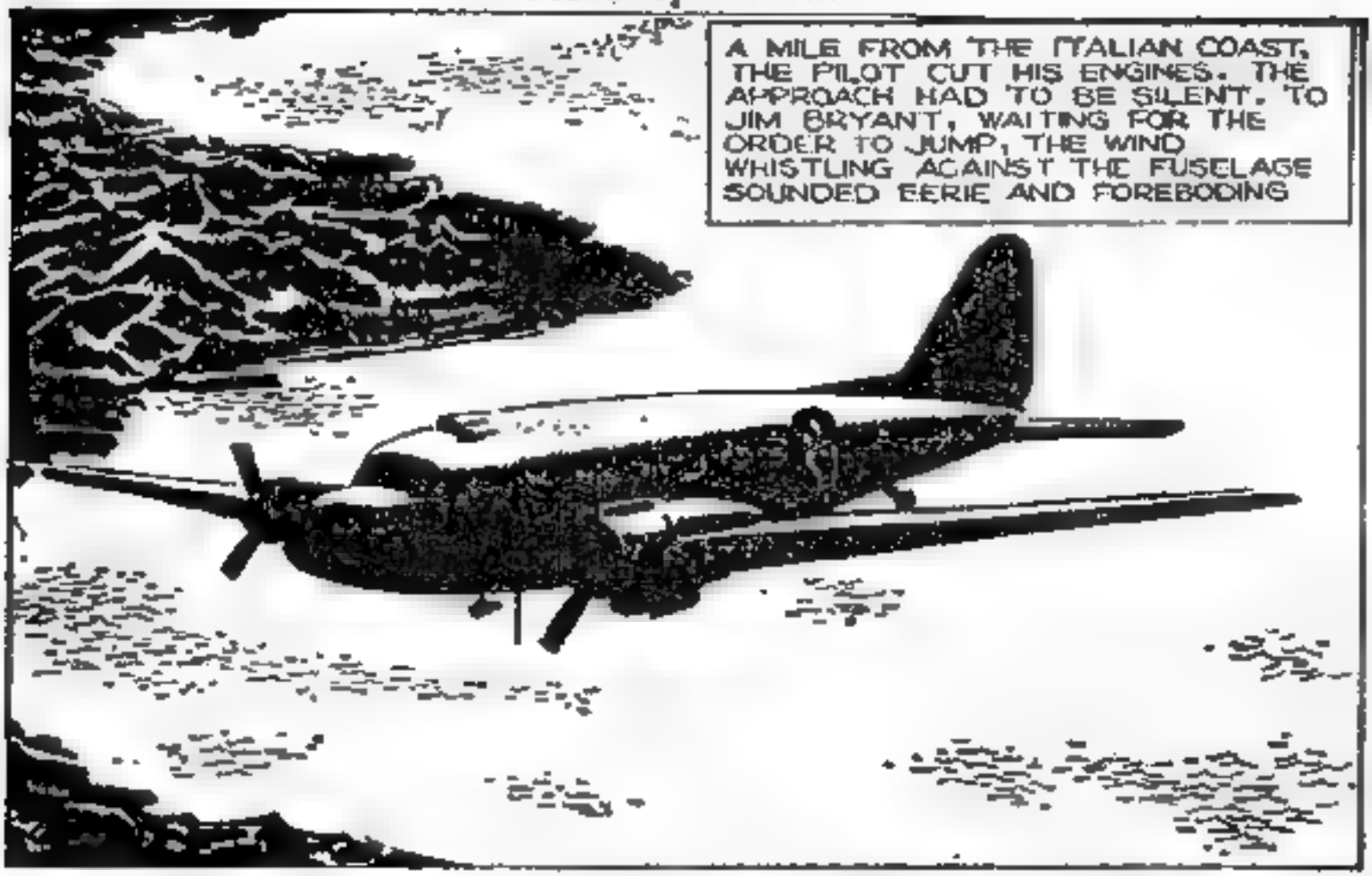
JIM BRYANT HAD STIFFENED AT THE OFFICER'S CRITICISM. IT WAS NOT A HAPPY INTRODUCTION TO A MAN WHOM HE WAS TO JOIN IN A DESPERATE MISSION.
COME OVER HERE AND I'LL EXPLAIN YOUR TASK. IT WON'T BE EASY -- BUT IT'S GOT TO BE DONE!


THE LINE OF THE ALLIED ADVANCE IS ALONG THE FLAT COASTAL AREA AND IS INDICATED BY THE ARROW. BUT HERE A PANZER DIVISION IS WAITING. THE PLAN IS TO DYNAMITE THE DAM, FLOOD THE VALLEY, AND SO PUT THE PANZER DIVISION OUT OF ACTION.

YOU HAVE TEN DAYS TO REACH YOUR OBJECTIVE. THE DAM MUST BE BLOWN ON THE MORNING OF THE FOURTEENTH -- BEFORE 0-SEVEN HUNDRED HOURS. ANY QUESTIONS, SERGEANT?
YES, SIR. WHEN DO WE START?

THAT NIGHT, ON A SICILIAN AIRFIELD, THE ROAR OF A DAKOTA'S TWIN ENGINES ECHOED ACROSS THE TARMAC. PACKS LADEN WITH FUSES, EXPLOSIVES AND RATIONS, FOUR MEN MADE THEIR WAY TO THE WAITING PLANE.

PRIVATES BEN DUKES AND RON TIERNEY MADE UP THE QUARTET. DUKES WAS DOUR, RARELY SPOKE, BUT WHAT HE DID SAY USUALLY MADE SENSE. TIERNEY WAS ROUND-FACED, JOCULAR. JIM LIKED THEM -- KNEW HE COULD RELY ON THEM—BUT HE WAS NOT SO SURE OF CAPTAIN BAXTER.
WE'LL RUN OVER THE ORDERS AGAIN. EVERYONE MUST GET IT RIGHT. NOW, LISTEN ...
DETAILED PLANS ARE USELESS ON A JOB LIKE THIS -- THE SLIGHTEST HITCH CAN THROW THEM HAYWIRE ...


A MILE FROM THE ITALIAN COAST, THE PILOT CUT HIS ENGINES. THE APPROACH HAD TO BE SILENT. TO JIM BRYANT, WAITING FOR THE ORDER TO JUMP, THE WIND WHISTLING AGAINST THE FUSELAGE SOUNDED EERIE AND FOREBODING

IT WAS ON SUCH A NIGHT HE HAD JUMPED MONTHS BEFORE -- AND SUDDEN DEATH HAD AWAITED HIM AND HIS COMPANIONS ON THE DARKNESS-SHROUDED EARTH BELOW.

BUT THIS TIME NO UGLY CHATTER OF MACHINE-GUNS, NOR VIVID FLASH OF TRACERS SHATTERED THE STILLNESS OF THE NIGHT.

SILENTLY THE FOUR S.A.S. MEN GROUPED UP. WHILST THE SERGEANT AND OFFICER STOOD GUARD, TIERNEY AND DUKES BURIED THE PARACHUTES WITH METHODICAL THOROUGHNESS.

FOUR MEN, ALONE IN ENEMY-INFESTED TERRITORY — BUT BAXTER MIGHT HAVE BEEN ON THE PARADE GROUND BACK AT CAMP.

RIGHT, SERGEANT! NOW WE WILL RECONNOITRE THE DAM BEFORE WE FIND SOMEWHERE TO HOLE UP.

JIM CONSIDERED THAT LINE OF ACTION DANGEROUS AND FOOLHARDY. IF THEY WERE SEEN, THE WHOLE MISSION WAS IMPERILLED. BUT BAXTER WAS IN COMMAND. CLEARLY HE DID NOT MEAN THEM TO FORGET IT.
HE MUST BE NUTS!
CUT THE CHATTER, TIERNEY!

AS SECOND-IN-COMMAND, JIM HAD TO SUPPORT BAXTER'S DECISIONS, BUT HIS SYMPATHY WAS WITH THE MEN. THEY PROCEEDED CAUTIOUSLY FOR SOME DISTANCE, SILENT AS SHADOWS -- AND IT WAS AS WELL THEY WERE. THE DAM WAS HEAVILY GUARDED.
HOLD IT!

THEY RETRACED THEIR STEPS AND, AS SOON AS THEY FOUND SOME COVER, BAXTER FACED JIM, HIS FEATURES CONTORTED WITH RAGE ...
I HAVE EYES IN MY HEAD, SERGEANT! WHEN I WANT YOU TO GIVE ORDERS I'LL TELL YOU SO. YOU'LL DO AS I SAY, UNDERSTAND THAT, ONCE AND FOR ALL.
THE SERGEANT KNEW A SHOWDOWN WITH THE STIFF-NECKED CAPTAIN WAS INEVITABLE AND HE DID NOT BUDGE AN INCH.
THERE ARE MORE THINGS TO CONSIDER THAN YOUR PERSONAL FEELINGS, SIR! IF YOU'D TAKEN ANOTHER STEP YOU WOULD HAVE BEEN SEEN, THE MISSION WOULD HAVE FAILED AND THE MEN PAID WITH THEIR LIVES FOR YOUR CARELESSNESS...

THE OFFICER HAD NEVER BEEN SPOKEN TO SO BLUNTLY BEFORE AND HIS LAST VESTIGE OF CONTROL SNAPPED. SNARLING IN FURY, HE FLUNG HIMSELF AT BRYANT -- FORGETTING RANK, THEIR MISSION -- FISTS BUNCHED AND FLAILING!

YOU INSOLENT CUR!

INSTINCTIVELY, THE SERGEANT RODE THE WILD PUNCHES. IT WAS A CRAZY SITUATION -- BUT STILL BAXTER LUNGED AT HIM, ARMS SWINGING...

BRYANT AVOIDED ANOTHER SWING AND STABBED IN A SHORT, HARD LEFT WHICH EXPELLED THE AIR FROM THE CAPTAIN'S BODY IN ONE LONG, GASPING RUSH. A RIGHT TO THE CHIN FOLLOWED, PACKED WITH ALL THE POWER OF HIS HUNDRED AND EIGHTY POUNDS OF BONE AND MUSCLE.
IF -- YOU WANT A -- FIGHT -- YOU CAN -- HAVE ONE!

BAXTER SPRAWLED ON HIS BACK, BUT QUICKLY FORCED HIMSELF TO ONE ELBOW. AN UNCONTROLLABLE, SENSELESS HATE BANISHED ALL REASON FROM HIS BRAIN. HE SNATCHED AT HIS REVOLVER HOLSTER.
LUCIUS! HE'S....

THE PISTOL GLINTED MENACINGLY IN THE DARKNESS AND BRYANT STARED AT IT IN AMAZEMENT. ALREADY BAXTER'S FINGER WAS TIGHTENING ON THE TRIGGER . . .
DON'T-- DON'T BE A FOOL, BAXTER!!

DUKES IT WAS WHO ACTED. SNATCHING A ROCK FROM THE GROUND, HE HURLED IT AT THE OFFICER'S HAND -- HITTING IT. BUT ALREADY THE REVOLVER HAD FIRED . . .
THAT'S DONE IT! THAT'LL BRING JERRY-- AT THE DOUBLE!

AS THE SOUND OF THAT SHOT ECHOED SHARPLY THROUGH THE SURROUNDING HILLS BAXTER SUDDENLY REALISED JUST WHAT HE HAD DONE. BUT FOR THE MOMENT, THE SERGEANT HAD ASSUMED COMMAND.

TURNING HIS BACK ON THE DIRECTION OF THE DAM, BRYANT GET A FAST PACE. BUT AS THEY PASSED OVER A PATCH OF OPEN GROUND THE MOON BROKE THROUGH A RIFT IN THE CLOUDS —AND THEY WERE SEEN!

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THE UNNERVING, STACCATO CRACKLE OF GUNFIRE TOLD THE S.A.S. MEN THAT THEY HAD BEEN SEEN. THE TREACHEROUS MOONLIGHT MADE THEM PERFECT TARGETS ...

BAXTER — HE'S BEEN HIT!

AT TIERNEY'S CRY, JIM BRYANT PAUSED IN HIS STRIDE. THE FACT THAT ONLY MINUTES BEFORE BAXTER HAD TRIED TO SHOOT HIM DID NOT MATTER ...

YOU GO ON — FIND SOMEWHERE TO LAY UP. I'M GOING BACK FOR HIM.

BAXTER WAS ALREADY STRUGGLING TO REGAIN HIS FEET. HE HAD BEEN HIT IN THE ARM BUT HIS LIPS WERE SET DETERMINEDLY AND HIS RECENT ATTACK OF UNREASONED RAGE HAD VANISHED.

LEAVE ME, BRYANT! THE MISSION MUST COME FIRST!

DON'T ARGUE — YOU'LL MAKE IT!

THEY CLIMBED URGENTLY, WITH BAXTER STUMBLING AND GASPING AT THE PAIN OF HIS WOUND. BUT BRYANT FORCED HIM ONWARDS WITHOUT PAUSE FOR REST. UNTIL, AT LAST, THEY CAME UP WITH TIERNEY...
WE'VE FOUND A CAVE, SERGEANT -- SCREENED BY BUSHES. UP HERE.
GOOD FOR YOU.

CONCEALMENT WAS THEIR ONLY HOPE -- BAXTER WAS TOO WEAK TO GO ON. DUKES PARTED THE BUSHES AND JIM HALF CARRIED THE WOUNDED OFFICER INTO THE DARKNESS BEYOND.
HURRY, SARGE THOSE JERRIES CAN'T BE FAR OFF.

NO SOONER WERE THEY SAFELY BEHIND THE SCREEN OF BUSHES THAN GREY-CLAD, JACK-BOOTED FIGURES CAME INTO VIEW. THE HUNTED MEN WATCHED, SCARCELY DARING TO BREATHE ... BUT THE GERMANS PASSED THEIR HIDE-OUT WITHOUT A GLANCE.

THAT NIGHT, WHILST ONE KEPT GUARD, THE OTHERS RESTED IN THE SHALLOW CAVE. AT FIRST LIGHT, SERGEANT BRYANT LEFT THEM AND MADE HIS WAY BACK TO THE DAM ...

HE WAS FORCED TO DUCK OUT OF SIGHT AS A NUMBER OF WEARY GERMANS PASSED BY AFTER THEIR ABORTIVE SEARCH. IN THE STILL COUNTRYSIDE THEIR VOICES CARRIED CLEARLY ...
THE ENGLANDERS ... THEY ARE PROBABLY MILES AWAY FROM HERE NOW. LET'S GET BACK TO THE VILLAGE.
VILLAGE?

THE MENTION OF A VILLAGE HAD STARTLED THE SERGEANT, FOR IF THEIR PLAN WAS SUCCESSFUL, THE VALLEY WOULD BE FLOODED BY THE WATERS FROM THE DAM. HE WORKED AROUND UNTIL HE COULD SEE DOWN THE VALLEY AND SURE ENOUGH ...
GREAT HEAVENS! THAT PLACE'LL BE RIGHT IN THE PATH OF THE FLOOD WATERS. AND ... AND I'VE A FEELING I'VE SEEN THAT VILLAGE BEFORE. SURELY ... IT ... CAN'T ... BE ...

HIS MIND IN TURMOIL, JIM BRYANT HURRIED BACK TO THE CAVE. BAXTER WAS SLEEPING RESTLESSLY.

WHERE'S THE CAPTAIN'S HAVERSACK ? I'VE GOT TO SEE THE MAPS RIGHT NOW!

IMPATIENTLY, BRYANT SPREAD OUT THE LARGE-SCALE MAP OF THE AREA. HIS WORST FEARS WERE REALISED. THE DOOMED VILLAGE WAS PADOSTA, THE VILLAGE WHERE HE HAD SHELTERED WEEKS BEFORE -- WHERE HE WOULD HAVE DIED BUT FOR THE COURAGE OF THE PEOPLE.

PADOSTA

AT THAT MOMENT, BAXTER STIRRED AND HIS EYES FLICKERED OPEN. HIS WORDS CAME SLURRED AND HALTINGLY...

B-BRYANT, I'M SICK! YOU'LL HAVE TO TAKE COMMAND UNTIL I'M WELL AGAIN. DON'T FORGET-- THE DAM -- IT MUST BE BLOWN AT -- THE -- TIME -- ARRANGED.

WE CAN'T DO IT! THERE'S A VILLAGE RIGHT IN THE PATH THE FLOOD WATERS WILL TAKE!

OUR - OUR INFORMATION IS THAT THE VILLAGE HAS BEEN EVACUATED BY THE GERMANS. THE PLAN MUST BE CARRIED OUT EXACTLY! THAT'S AN ORDER!

BAXTER SLUMPED BACK EXHAUSTED TORN BY DOUBT. BRYANT STARED DOWN AT THE OFFICER, HAD BAXTER LIED? SOME INSTINCT TOLD JIM THAT HIS FRIENDS WERE STILL IN PADOSTA. HE MUST FIND OUT FOR SURE.

Chapter 5. ALTERNATIVE PLAN

STILL HE SAW NO ONE. AT PERRONI'S HOUSE, HE TAPPED LIGHTLY ON THE OUTER DOOR THREE TIMES. FOR A QUARTER -- HALF A MINUTE -- NOTHING HAPPENED AND HE WAS ABOUT TO TURN AWAY. THEN THE DOOR OPENED...

SIGNOR JIM! WHAT-- COME IN -- QUICKLY!

STARTLED DELIGHT WAS IN SOFIA'S EYES AS SHE USHERED HIM INTO THE HOUSE WHERE THE MAYOR HIMSELF GREETED THE SERGEANT ENTHUSIASTICALLY.

MY FRIEND -- WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? YOU ARE IN GREAT DANGER. THERE ARE MANY GERMANS NEAR, SOME GUARDING THE DAM -- AND A WHOLE PANZER DIVISION IN THE VALLEY BELOW.

DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME, LUIGI, BUT YOU AND SOFIA -- HAGN'T THE VILLAGE BEEN EVACUATED? WE WERE TOLD PADOSTA WAS EMPTY.

A FEW OF US STAYED ON, SIGNOR JIM -- PADOSTA IS OUR HOME!

JIM BRYANT'S FEARS HAD BEEN REALISED. HE NEEDED TIME TO THINK — AND HE NEEDED A DOCTOR FOR BAXTER. HE MENTIONED THIS LATTER TO LUIGI AND AT ONCE THE MAYOR HURRIED AWAY TO RETURN SHORTLY WITH DOCTOR BRAZZANO.

YOU ARE BACK AGAIN, SERGEANT, AND YOU HAVE A COMPANION WHO IS WOUNDED. WELL, I HAVE MY MEDICINES. TAKE ME TO HIM...

THE GALLANT LITTLE DOCTOR DID NOT SEEM TO GIVE A THOUGHT TO THE RISK INVOLVED — A LIFE WAS IN THE BALANCE AND IT WAS HIS DUTY...

YOU WILL NEED PROVISIONS, WINE...

NO, SOFIA, THERE IS NO NEED THIS TIME. WE HAVE EVERYTHING WE NEED.

JIM HAD TOLD NO ONE THE REASON FOR HIS COMING AND NO QUESTIONS HAD BEEN ASKED. BUT AS HE CLIMBED THE HILL WITH THE DOCTOR PANTING FROM HIS EXERTIONS JUST BEHIND, HE HOPED AGAINST HOPE THAT HE COULD FIND A SOLUTION TO HIS PROBLEM...

IT'S NOT FAR NOW, DOC.

THE CAVE WAS LIT BY A SOLITARY CANDLE -- INVISIBLE FROM OUTSIDE BECAUSE OF THE THICKNESS OF THE BUSHES. UNDER THIS SOMBRE LIGHT, DOCTOR BRAZZANO MINISTERED TO HIS PATIENT.
TO THINK THAT LITTLE OLD DOC RISKED HIS LIFE TO COME OUT HERE FROM PADOSTA WHEN...
SAVE IT, TIERNEY. IT SHOULDN'T SURPRISE YOU WHEN YOU KNOW WHAT THE PEOPLE OF THAT VILLAGE DID FOR ME.

AT LONG LAST BRAZZANO STOOD UP. HE WAS SMILING, THE CALM, CONFIDENT SMILE OF A DOCTOR WHO HAS SAVED YET ANOTHER LIFE...
HE WILL GET WELL SOON, MY FRIEND. THE FEVER IS BROKEN. IN A DAY OR TWO HE WILL BE ON HIS FEET AGAIN...

DOCTOR BRAZZANO WAS RIGHT. BAXTER RECOVERED AND WAS SOON THE COMPETENT, DOMINEERING OFFICER AGAIN... DETERMINED TO CARRY OUT THE PLAN OF DESTRUCTION. MID-MORNING ON THE 10TH. HE WAS WAITING WHEN JIM RETURNED FROM A RECONNAISSANCE.
BRYANT... YOU'VE BEEN GONE SINCE DAWN. WHERE THE BLAZES HAVE YOU BEEN?

NO ONE HAD YET TOLD BAXTER HOW HIS LIFE HAD BEEN SAVED BY THE ITALIAN DOCTOR, FOR THE OFFICER BRIDLED INSTANTLY AND FURIOUSLY AT ANY MENTION OF THE LOCAL INHABITANTS..
YOU KNOW WHAT I THINK ABOUT BLOWING THE DAM, SIR. PADOSTA WILL PERISH BENEATH THE FLOOD WATERS.
I WILL NOT DISCUSS THE MATTER, SERGEANT! MY ORDERS ARE CLEAR AND PRECISE — THE DAM MUST BE DESTROYED ON THE FOURTEENTH!

IT WAS AS IF BAXTER WISHED TO SHUT HIS EYES TO THE EXISTENCE OF THE VILLAGERS WHOSE LIVES WOULD BE IMPERILLED BY THE FLOOD.

I'VE SEEN THE DAM BY DAY AND NIGHT. IT'S HEAVILY GUARDED. WE HAVEN'T A DOG'S CHANCE OF LAYING THE CHARGES. NOW, IF YOU'LL LISTEN TO MY ALTERNATIVE PLAN, PADOSTA CAN BE SAVED AND...

THIS IS WAR, BRYANT! WE CAN'T AFFORD TO BE SENTIMENTAL. I WAS RIGHT BACK AT H.Q. IN SICILY. YOU'RE NOT THE MAN FOR THIS JOB, OR ANY OTHER WITH RESPONSIBILITY! IF I HAVE MY WAY YOU WON'T BE WEARING THOSE STRIPES ONCE WE GET BACK TO BASE.

TWICE SARGE SAVED YOUR LIFE, SIR -- I THINK YOU OUGHT TO LISTEN TO HIM.

DUKES USUALLY STOOD BY AND LET EVERYONE ELSE DO THE TALKING. BUT NOW HE FACED BAXTER ALMOST BELLIGERENTLY...

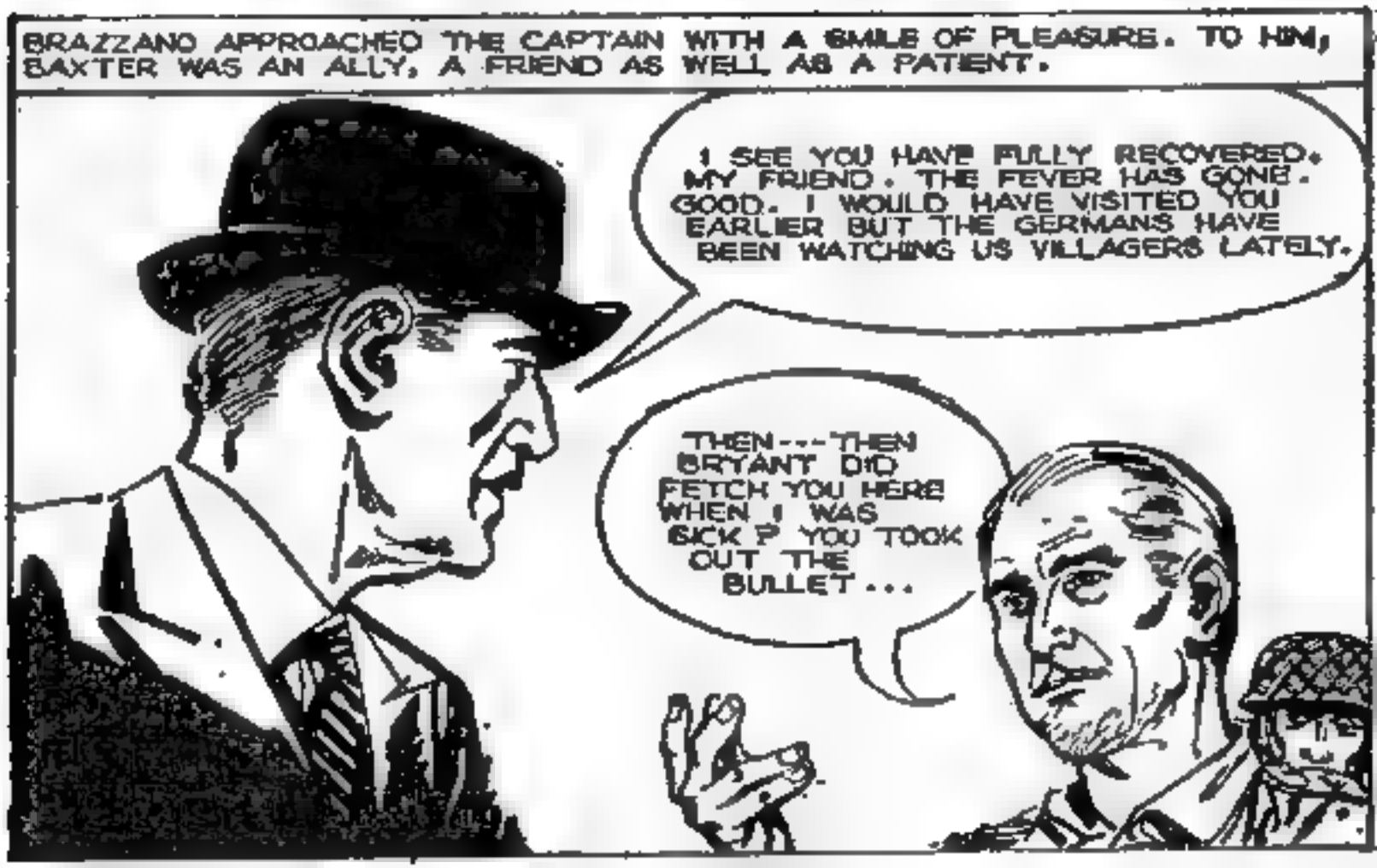
WE'RE FOUR BLOKES OUT HERE DOING A JOB -- WHAT MATTER HOW WE DO IT SO LONG AS IT'S DONE? THE ITALIANS IN PADOSTA OUGHT TO HAVE A CHANCE. I'M WITH THE SARGE.

ME, TOO. HEAR SERGEANT BRYANT'S PLAN BEFORE YOU TURN IT DOWN.

BAXTER'S FACE WAS CONTORTED WITH RAGE. THIS WAS INSUBORDINATION. HE TRIED TO SPEAK, TO REMIND THESE MEN THAT HE WAS IN COMMAND. BUT DUKES WENT ON REMORSELESSLY.
SARGE SAVED YOU FROM THE JERRIES WHEN YOU GOT SHOT AND HE RISKED HIS LIFE A SECOND TIME TO GO TO PADOSTA TO FETCH HELP. BUT FOR HIM AND THAT ITALIAN DOC YOU WOULD HAVE PASSED OUT FOR GOOD.
BRYANT BROUGHT A DOCTOR FROM THE VILLAGE TO TEND TO ME? THE FOOL! HE'LL TELL THE GERMANS — THEY'LL BE OUT HERE IN FORCE ...

THAT WAS FIVE DAYS AGO, SIR. THE GERMANS WOULD HAVE BEEN HERE A LONG TIME AGO IF THE DOCTOR HAD BETRAYED US. HE SAVED YOUR LIFE. HE BROKE DOWN THE FEVER. SARGE'S NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO SHOULD BE MIGHTY GRATEFUL TO THE VILLAGERS DOWN THERE.
I DON'T BELIEVE IT — IT'S A TRICK TO MAKE ME DISOBEY ORDERS. BY THUNDER! YOU'LL ANSWER FOR THIS WHEN WE GET BACK — ALL OF YOU!

THE SUDDEN APPEARANCE CLOSE BY OF A DARK-CLAD FIGURE STARTLED THEM ALL INTO SILENCE. THREE OF THEM BREATHED SIGHS OF RELIEF WHEN THEY RECOGNISED DOCTOR BRAZZANO, BUT BAXTER HAD ALREADY SNATCHED HIS PISTOL FROM ITS HOLSTER.
HOLD IT, SIR! THAT'S THE DOCTOR!


BRAZZANO APPROACHED THE CAPTAIN WITH A SMILE OF PLEASURE. TO HIM, BAXTER WAS AN ALLY, A FRIEND AS WELL AS A PATIENT.
I SEE YOU HAVE FULLY RECOVERED, MY FRIEND. THE FEVER HAS GONE. GOOD. I WOULD HAVE VISITED YOU EARLIER BUT THE GERMANS HAVE BEEN WATCHING US VILLAGERS LATELY.
THEN---THEN BRYANT DID FETCH YOU HERE WHEN I WAS SICK? YOU TOOK OUT THE BULLET...

THE OFFICER LAPSED INTO STUMBLING SILENCE AND ALLOWED THE DOCTOR TO EXAMINE HIS WOUND. SOON BRAZZANO SET OFF BACK TO PADOSTA...
GOODBYE, MY FRIENDS, AND GOOD LUCK IN YOUR MISSION. WHATEVER YOU DO TO HELP BRING ABOUT THE DEFEAT OF THE GERMANS HAS THE BLESSING OF EVERY MAN, WOMAN AND CHILD IN PADOSTA.

CAPTAIN BAXTER SAID LITTLE AFTER THE DOCTOR HAD GONE. BUT SOON HE ORDERED THE SERGEANT TO SET OUT WITH HIM TO RECONNOITRE THE DAM.
YOU KNOW THE BEST WAY, BRYANT. LEAD ON.
WE CAN'T APPROACH NEARER THAN HALF A MILE IN DAYLIGHT, SIR. BUT WE CAN GET A FINE VIEW THROUGH FIELD GLASSES.

GERMAN SENTRIES, THEIR JACKBOOTS STOMPING RHYTHMICALLY ON THE CONCRETE, PATROLLED THE TOP OF THE DAM WHILST OTHERS MANNED THE HEAVILY-FORTIFIED BLOCK-HOUSES AT EITHER END

TO BLOW THE DAM THE S.A.S. MEN HAD BEEN ISSUED WITH LIMPET MINES FIXED WITH FUSES WHICH WOULD BE TIMED TO EXPLODE SIMULTANEOUSLY AT ZERO HOUR ON THE 14TH. BUT PLANNING STAFF COULD NOT HAVE KNOWN HOW HEAVILY GUARDED THE OBJECTIVE WOULD BE.

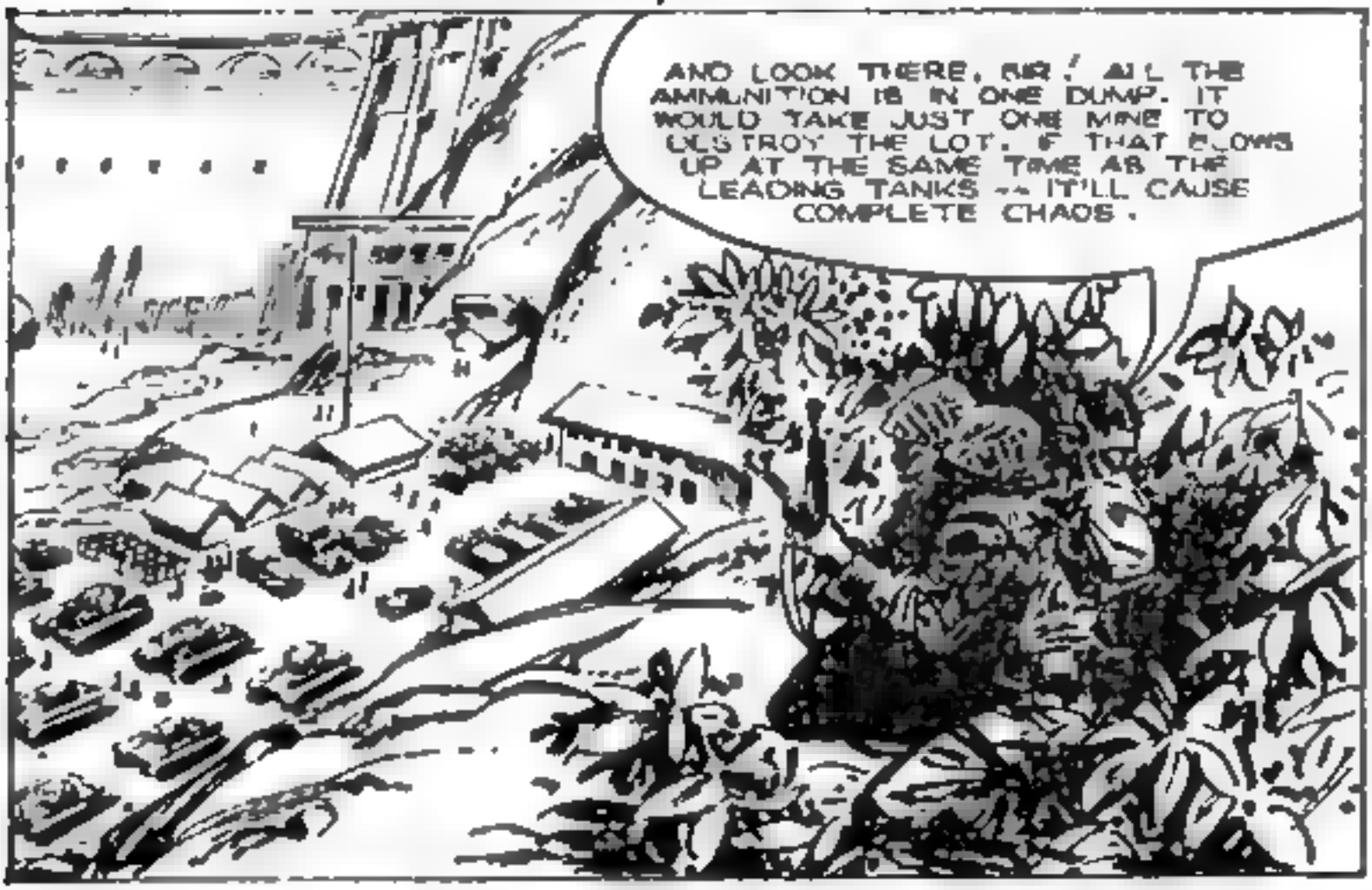
I'LL LISTEN TO WHAT YOU'VE GOT TO SAY, BRYANT. BUT I WON'T PROMISE ANYTHING. MY ORDERS ARE TO BLOW THE DAM AND WE'LL HAVE TO ATTEMPT IT UNLESS YOU HAVE A BETTER PLAN.
THE NEUTRALISING OF THE PANZER DIVISION -- THAT'S WHAT WE'VE GOT TO DO. WHAT DOES IT MATTER HOW WE DO IT -- AS LONG AS THOSE TIGER TANKS CAN'T GO INTO ACTION WHEN OUR BOYS ADVANCE ?

JIM FELT JUBILANT. AT LAST HE HAD WON A CONCESSION FROM THE IRON-WILLED OFFICER -- A CONCESSION THAT MIGHT MEAN LIFE FOR THE DOOMED VILLAGE OF PADOSTA...
LET ME SHOW YOU WHAT I HAVE IN MIND, SIR. IT'S A LONG TREK, D'YOU THINK YOU CAN MAKE IT ?
GO AHEAD... WE'LL SEE.

THE GOING WAS TOUGH, OVER ROCK STREWN TERRAIN WHICH TRIED EACH MAN'S ENDURANCE TO THE LIMIT. BUT BAXTER NEVER FALTERED ONCE, DESPITE HIS RECENT WOUND AND BRYANT WAS AWARE OF A GROWING RESPECT FOR THE OFFICER.

EVEN WHEN A HEAVILY ARMED GERMAN PATROL PASSED MERE PACES AWAY FROM THEM, BAXTER DID NOT FLINCH AT THE PROXIMITY OF DANGER. .
HE'S PIG-HEADED AND BLIND TO EVERYTHING BUT HIS DUTY, BUT HE'S GOT WHAT IT TAKES.

IT WAS MID-AFTERNOON WHEN THEY LOOKED DOWN ON THE MIGHT OF THE GERMAN PANZER DIVISION. MONSTROUS TIGER TANKS WERE ARRAYED IN SERRIED FORMATION, THEIR 88 MILLIMETRE GUNS POINTING MENACINGLY TOWARDS THE COAST ALONG WHICH THE ALLIED ADVANCE MUST COME.
THEY KNOW OUR BOYS ARE COMING. IT'LL BE A MASSACRE, BRYANT. WE MUST BLOW THE DAM!
WAIT, SIR. SUPPOSING WE KNOCK OUT THE LEADING LINE OF TANKS AT DAWN ON THE FOURTEENTH — WE'VE ENOUGH LIMPET MINES TO DO THAT. THE OTHER TANKS WILL HAVE TO DEPLOY AROUND THEM, AND PACKED AS THEY ARE, IT WILL TAKE THEM HOURS.


AND LOOK THERE, SIR! ALL THE AMMUNITION IS IN ONE DUMP. IT WOULD TAKE JUST ONE MINE TO DESTROY THE LOT. IF THAT BLOWS UP AT THE SAME TIME AS THE LEADING TANKS -- IT'LL CAUSE COMPLETE CHAOS.

FOR WHAT SEEMED AN AGE, BAXTER STUDIED THE GERMAN FORCES THROUGH HIS FIELD GLASSES WHILST JIM WAITED IN A FEVER OF IMPATIENCE. WOULD HIS PLAN BE ADOPTED -- OR WERE THE GOOD-HEARTED PEOPLE OF PADOSTA TO PAY THE GRIM PRICE OF WAR?

AT LONG LAST BAXTER LOWERED THE GLASSES AND THEY SILENTLY MOVED OUT FROM THEIR VANTAGE POINT. IT WAS NOT UNTIL THEY WERE WELL ON THEIR WAY TO THE CAVE WHICH HAD BEEN THEIR HIDE OUT FOR SEVERAL DAYS THAT THE CAPTAIN SPOKE. HIS MIND WAS MADE UP.

I'VE THOUGHT IT ALL OUT, BRYANT. YOUR PLAN HAS A FAR GREATER CHANCE OF SUCCESS THAN THE ORIGINAL ONE ... WE'LL TRY IT!

IT WAS 5 A.M. ON THE 14TH.-- THE CRUCIAL DAY ON WHICH THEIR MISSION OF DESTRUCTION MUST BE ACCOMPLISHED. THE S.A.S. MEN WERE ON THE DARK HILLSIDE ABOVE THE VALLEY WHERE THE PANZER DIVISION WAS ASSEMBLED. PLANS WERE MADE! IT ONLY REMAINED TO CARRY THEM OUT ...

YOU THREE FIX THE LIMPET MINES TO THE LEADING LINE OF TANKS. ARE ALL THE FUSES SET TO BLOW AT 0-SIX-FOUR-FIVE?

ALL SET, SIR.

BAXTER'S VOICE WAS FIRM, ASSURED...
WE MEET BACK HERE AT O-SIX HUNDRED. IF ONE, OR MORE, FAILS TO TURN UP WITHIN THIRTY MINUTES -- MAKE YOUR ESCAPE INDEPENDENTLY. OKAY -- MOVE OUT -- AND GOOD LUCK!

AS SERGEANT BRYANT SNAKED HIS WAY FORWARD ON HIS STOMACH, MAKING NO WHISPER OF SOUND TO BREAK THE STILLNESS OF THE NIGHT, HIS THOUGHTS WERE WITH BAXTER. THE CAPTAIN HAD CHOSEN HIMSELF TO LAY THE MINE IN THE HEAVILY-GUARDED AMMUNITION DUMP.

JIM CLAMPED HIS FIRST LIMPET MINE BENEATH THE ENGINE COMPARTMENT OF A TIGER TANK WHILST A SENTRY LOUNGED AGAINST THE CATERPILLAR TRACKS NOT TWENTY FEET AWAY ONE FALSE MOVE, ONE CLINK OF METAL, AND THE ALARM WOULD BE RAISED.. AND DEATH WOULD BE HIS ONLY REWARD.

AN HOUR SPED AWAY -- THEN ANOTHER. PROGRESS WAS PAINFULLY SLOW, BUT FINALLY JIM HAD PLACED ALL HIS MINES IN POSITION. NOW THE MOST HAZARDOUS PART OF HIS TASK REMAINED. HE WAS NEARLY A MILE FROM THE RENDEZVOUS. THE TIME WAS 05.10, AND EVERY FOOT OF THE RETURN JOURNEY WOULD HAVE TO BE COVERED ON HIS STOMACH.

I WONDER HOW THE OTHER BOYS ARE MAKING OUT?

THE SERGEANT WAS A HUNDRED YARDS FROM THE RENDEZ-VOUS AND THE FIRST OMINOUS GLOW OF DAWN TINGED THE EASTERN SKY WHEN A FIGURE LOOMED UP A FEW FEET AWAY FROM HIM. HIS HAND REACHED FOR HIS KNIFE -- THEN HE RECOGNISED DUKES. THEY EXCHANGED BRIEF, EXUBERANT SIGNS OF SUCCESS.

THEY FOUND TIERNEY AWAITING THEM AT THE MEETING PLACE, HIS INFECTIOUS GRIN TELLING THEM OF HIS SUCCESS. BUT JIM WAS WORRIED ABOUT THE CAPTAIN. HE SHOULD HAVE BEEN BACK -- AND WITH EVERY SECOND, THE LIGHT WAS STRENGTHENING AND HIS CHANCES OF RETURNING UNSEEN DIMINISHING FAST.

CAPTAIN BAXTER HAD DIED -- AND WITH HIS DYING, HE HAD REDEEMED ANYTHING HE MIGHT HAVE SAID OR DONE BEFORE. BAXTER HAD DONE SOMETHING ELSE THAT DAY -- HE HAD EARNED THE RESPECT OF HIS COMPANIONS. FOR WHEN HE HAD BEEN SEEN HE HAD RACED INTO THE VALLEY WHERE THERE WAS NO COVER --- NO HOPE OF SURVIVAL, FOR TO RUN TOWARDS THE RENDEZVOUS WOULD HAVE SEALED THE FATE OF HIS MEN.

Field of Valour

THEY CLAMBERED UP THE STEEP, ROCKBOUND SLOPE ABOVE THE VALLEY, THANKFUL FOR THE PROFUSION OF SHRUBS AND TREES WHICH MADE THEM INVISIBLE FROM BELOW. WHEN THEY REACHED THE TOP, JIM BRYANT GLANCED AT HIS WATCH ...

SIX-FORTY FIVE! THOSE TANKS SHOULD BE GOING UP ANY MOMENT. I SURE HOPE BAXTER LAID HIS MINE. THE WHOLE SUCCESS OF THE PLAN DEPENDS ON THAT.

THE GERMAN PANZER DIVISION HAD BEEN ALERTED AT THE REPORTS OF THE ALLIES ADVANCING UP THE COAST. AS CREWS RACED FOR THEIR TIGER TANKS, ONE OF THE MONSTERS IN THE FRONT RANK DISINTEGRATED WITH A MIGHTY ROAR ...

EXPLOSION AFTER EXPLOSION FOLLOWED AS THE OTHER LIMPET MINES WERE DETONATED. SOON, THICK SMOKE FROM BURNING DIESEL OIL ROSE SKYWARDS IN A GRIM, BLACK PALL OF DEATH AND DESTRUCTION.

PANIC SPREAD AMONGST THE CRACK NAZI CREWS AS THEIR FRONT LINE OF TIGERS WAS EFFICIENTLY WRECKED. THEN THERE CAME A FINAL, GIGANTIC EXPLOSION WHICH MADE THE VERY EARTH TREMBLE — AND SENT A THUNDEROUS ROAR REVERBERATING UP THE VALLEY.

IT WAS 07·00 HOURS... AND THE ALLIED ADVANCE FORCES WERE RIGHT ON SCHEDULE. THE LEADING BRITISH TANKS CAME UPON A SCENE OF UTTER CONFUSION AND DEVASTATION — TO WHICH THEY ADDED SALVOS FROM THEIR GUNS.

IN HALF-AN-HOUR THE MIGHTY PANZER DIVISION WAS NO MORE. THE ROUT WAS COMPLETE. DEMORALISED, THE BADLY DEFEATED GERMANS WERE ROUNDED UP WHILST SHOCK TROOPS WENT AMONGST THE BURNING TANKS TO MOP UP.

WHERE THE ALLIES HAD EXPECTED TO MEET BITTER FIGHTING — WHERE ALL THE ADVANTAGES HAD BEEN WITH A RUTHLESS ENEMY -- THEY FOUND ONLY TOKEN RESISTANCE. IT WAS ALMOST A BLOODLESS VICTORY -- DUE SOLELY TO THE COURAGE AND INITIATIVE OF FOUR GALLANT MEN OF THE SPECIAL AIR SERVICE.

DUKES, TIERNEY AND SERGEANT JIM BRYANT WERE CONGRATULATED BY THE COMMANDING OFFICER OF THE ADVANCING FORCES.

YOU DID A GREAT JOB! IT WAS FORTUNATE YOU CHANGED PLANS AND DIDN'T BLOW THE DAM. WE WOULD HAVE SWAMPED THE GERMANS, BUT THIS SOIL IS SPONGY, WE HAVE SINCE FOUND -- IT MIGHT HAVE DELAYED THE ADVANCE FOR WEEKS, EVEN MONTHS. WHOSE DECISION WAS THAT .. CAPTAIN BAXTER'S?

YES. SIR.

H'M! A GOOD OFFICER, CAPTAIN BAXTER, WITH A VERY STRONG SENSE OF DUTY -- SO STRONG, IN FACT, THAT HE GAVE HIS LIFE SO THAT HIS MISSION BE ACCOMPLISHED.

ARRANGEMENTS WERE MADE FOR THE THREE S.A.S. MEN TO BE FLOWN BACK TO THEIR UNIT IN SICILY, BUT WITH A FEW HOURS LEFT BEFORE FLIGHT TIME, JIM TRUDGED UP THE VALLEY -- TOWARDS THE VILLAGE OF PADOSTA. IT WAS ONLY A SMALL VILLAGE BUT EVERY MAN, WOMAN AND CHILD THERE WAS HIS FRIEND . . .

HE MET THE MAYOR, LUIGI PERRONI, DOCTOR BRAZZANO, SOFIA AND THE EXCITED VILLAGERS. THEY WRUNG HIS HAND AND CONGRATULATED HIM AS IF HE, ALONE, HAD DEFEATED THE MIGHTY GERMAN PANZER DIVISION. TOO SOON IT WAS TIME FOR FAREWELLS. THE PEOPLE OF PADOSTA GATHERED TO WAVE HIM GOODBYE... STILL UNAWARE THAT HE HAD SAVED THEIR VILLAGE FROM DESTRUCTION AND THAT HE HAD AT LAST REPAID HIS GREAT DEBT...

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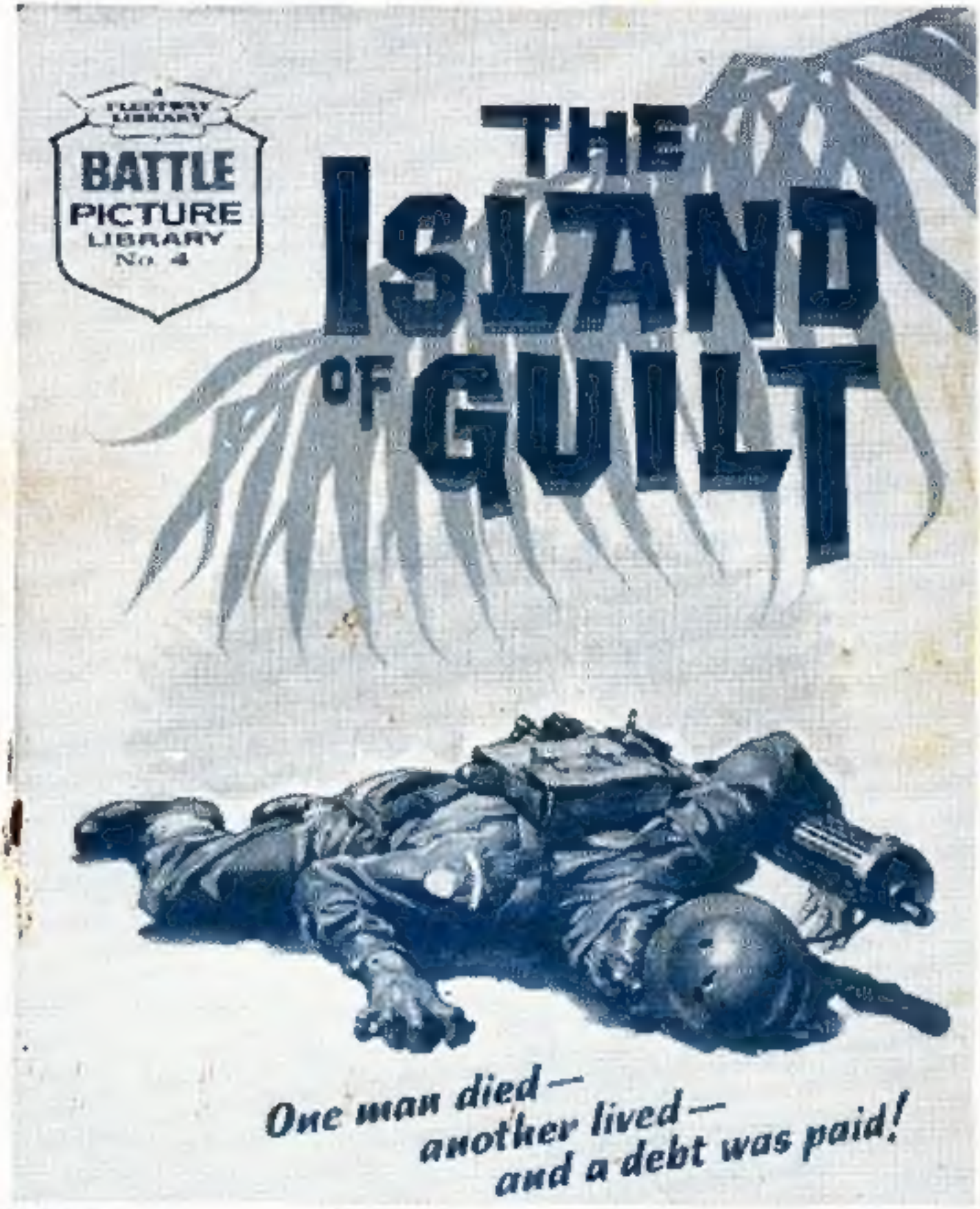

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